

Message Text

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ACTION SCCT-01

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FM AMEMBASSY BEIRUT

TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 5123

INFO AMEMBASSY ANKARA IMMEDIATE

LIMITED OFFICIAL USE SECTION 1 OF 2 BEIRUT 8476

E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: PINS, LE

SUBJECT: PRESS COVERAGE OF COL. MORGAN'S ABDUCTION

REF: STATE 157625

1. SUMMARY. LOCAL PRESS INTEREST IN COL. MORGAN'S DISAPPEARANCE TOUCHED OFF WEDNESDAY, JULY 2. FIRST PUBLISHED COVERAGE ON JULY 3 BASED ON AP STORY FROM ANKARA, JULY 2 STATE DEPARTMENT BRIEFING, AND LOCAL INQUIRIES AND INFORMED SPECULATION. MUCH FULLER JULY 4 COVERAGE BASED ON INTENSIVE LOCAL PRESS INQUIRIES TO EMBASSY, LEBANESE AUTHORITIES, PALESTINIAN SPOKESMEN, AND WITNESSES TO MORGAN'S MOVEMENTS IN BEIRUT, AS WELL AS ON UPIN INTERVIEW WITH MORGAN'S MOTHER AND JULY 3 STATE DEPARTMENT BRIEFING. PRO-LIBYAN "AS-SAFIR" CHARGES THAT U.S. HAS OFFICIALLY ACCUSED PALESTINIAN RESISTANCE OF KIDNAPPING. TWO OTHER LEFTIST PAPERS LINK MORGAN TO ALLEGED CIA ACTIVITIES IN LEBANON. END SUMMARY.

2. AMERICAN AND LOCAL PRESS INTEREST IN DISAPPEARANCE OF COL. MORGAN TOUCHED OFF WEDNESDAY, JULY 2 BY AP STORY
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FROM ANKARA. FIRST LOCAL PRESS COVERAGE ON THURSDAY,

JULY 3 BASED ON ANKARA STORY, JULY 2 STATE DEPARTMENT BRIEFING, AND LOCAL INQUIRIES AND INFORMED SPECULATION CARRIED PRINCIPALLY ON REUTER FILE.

3. JULY 3 ISSUE OF LEADING PRO-PLO "AL-MUHARRIR", ATTEMPTING TO CLAIM SCOOP, LINKED STORY OF MORGAN'S DISAPPEARANCE TO REPORT IT HAD CARRIED ON JUNE 30 TO EFFECT THAT "MEMBERS OF RESISTANCE MOVEMENT LAST NIGHT ARRESTED FOREIGNER TRAVELLING IN BLACK FIAT 1800 NEAR AIRPORT CIRCLE. HE WAS CARRYING NO IDENTITY PAPERS. INVESTIGATION WAS IMMEDIATELY LAUNCHED." ON JULY 3, PAPER REPORTED THAT "INVESTIGATION UNDERTAKEN YESTERDAY BY SECURITY MEN HAS REVEALED THAT FOREIGNER WHOM ARMED MEN DETAINED LAST SUNDAY NIGHT AT AIRPORT CIRCLE IS COLONEL IN U.S. ARMY NAMED ERNEST MORGAN. ON NIGHT OF HIS DETENTION, MORGAN WAS MOVING ABOUT IN SUSPICIOUS MANNER IN BLACK FIAT 1800 ... WITHOUT ANY IDENTITY PAPERS." ALTHOUGH AMERICAN AND LEBANESE JOURNALISTS WERE QUICK TO POINT OUT DISCREPANCIES BETWEEN THIS REPORT AND THAT OF TAXI DRIVER, AND ALTHOUGH NON-AMERICAN FOREIGNER DETAINED IN CIRCUMSTANCES MATCHING THOSE DESCRIBED IN "AL-MUHARRIR" SUBSEQUENTLY SURFACED, PAPER'S STORY OF JUNE 30 AND JULY 3 HAS BEEN WOVEN INTO SUBSEQUENT LOCAL PRESS ACCOUNTS, ESPECIALLY IN LEFTIST PAPERS, WHICH ARE EMPHASIZING "SUSPICIOUS NATURE" OF MORGAN'S MOVEMENTS.

4. OTHER JULY 3 PAPERS LIMITED THEMSELVES TO REPORTING STATE DEPARTMENT SPOKESMAN'S JULY 2 BRIEFING AND STATEMENTS OF "AMERICAN OFFICIAL" IN ANKARA AND TO REPRINTING REUTER COMMENT THAT "IF HE (MORGAN) IS IN COMMANDO HANDS THIS WILL POSE DELICATE DIPLOMATIC PROBLEMS FOR U.S. WHICH REFUSES TO RECOGNIZE PLO.... IN ORDER TO CONDUCT NEGOTIATIONS FOR HIS RELEASE U.S. MIGHT ASK LEBANON TO MEDIATE, BUT IN CURRENT INTERNATIONAL POLITICAL SITUATION PLO MIGHT SEEK TO BARGAIN FOR COLONEL'S RELEASE, OBSERVERS SAID." REUTER CORRESPONDENT HAS CONFIRMED TO EMBASSY THAT ABOVE IS PURELY HIS OWN SPECULATION AND THAT ALL HIS QUIRIES TO PALESTINIAN AND LEBANESE CONTACTS, LIKE THOSE OF OTHER WESTERN CORRESPONDENTS, HAVE DRAWN A BLANK.

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5. JULY 4 PAPERS CARRY MUCH FULLER REPORTING BASED ON UPI INTERVIEW WITH MORGAN'S MOTHER, JULY 3 STATE DEPARTMENT BRIEFING, AND INTENSIVE LOCAL PRESS INQUIRIES TO EMBASSY, LEBANESE AUTHORITIES, PALESTINIAN SPOKESMEN, AND WITNESSES FAMILIAR WITH MORGAN'S MOVEMENTS IN BEIRUT.

6. JULY 4 ISSUE OF PRO-LIBYAN "AS-SAFIR" HEADLINES UPI INTERVIEW WITH MORGAN'S MOTHER WITH "WASHINGTON ACCUSES

PALESTINIAN RESISTANCE OF KIDNAPPING AMERICAN OFFICER"
AND QUOTES SECRETARY OF ARMY'S REPORTED TELEGRAM TO
HER AS PROOF THAT "AMERICAN SECRETARY OF ARMY'S OFFICE
YESTERDAY GRATUITOUSLY ACCUSED PALESTINIAN RESISTANCE
OF KIDNAPPING."

7. IN REVIEWING INCIDENT ITSELF, JULY 4 ISSUES OF
RESPONSIBLE PAPERS CONFINE THEMSELVES TO DETAILS OUTLINED
IN BEIRUT 8377 AND RELEASED IN RESPONSE TO QUERIES.
ENGLISH-LANGUAGE "DAILY STAR" GOES BEYOND THIS ON BASIS
OF NUMEROUS INTERVIEWS WITH PALESTINIAN AND LEBANESE
SPOKESMEN AND WITNESSES: "INFORMED PALESTINIAN SOURCE...
SPECULATED THAT IF IT WAS FOUND THAT MISSING COLONEL
HAD FALLEN INTO HANDS OF PALESTINIANS, IT COULD BE
EMBARRASSING DILEMMA FOR PLO. AT PRESENT, ALL MAJOR
COMMANDO ORGANIZATIONS ARE DENYING THAT THEY HAVE COL.
MORGAN IN THEIR CUSTODY. 'WE WOULD NOT ATTEMPT TO BARGAIN
WITH ISRAEL OVER COL. MORGAN IN EXCHANGE FOR PRISONERS
HELD IN ISRAEL,' THE INFORMED SOURCES SAID. 'NOT AFTER
KHARTOUM. KIDNAPPING OR KILLING AMERICAN CITIZENS IS NOT
SOMETHING WE WISH TO GET INVOLVED IN. THIS IS BECAUSE
SUCH AN ACTION COULD POSSIBLY DAMAGE PLO'S RELATIONS WITH
CERTAIN ARAB COUNTRIES AND HAVE IMPLICATIONS ON ALREADY
DIFFICULT INTERNAL SITUATION IN LEBANON.'
IF#, HOWEVER, HE HAD BEEN TAKEN BY MEMBERS OF REJECTION
FRONT, THEN IT WOULD NOT RPT NOT BE TOO DIFFICULT TO
GET HIM BACK, THE SOURCE COMMENTED. PLO STILL MAINTAINED
LINKS WITH REJECTION FRONT EVEN THOUGH FRONT RECENTLY

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WITH DREW FROM EXCOMM, HE SAID. PAPER FOES ON TO
ENTION THAT ACCORDING TO "AGENCY REPORT" (WHICH THIS
EMBASSY HAD NOT SEEN) AS AMERICAN WAS PULLED FROM TAXI,
ARMED MEN TOLD DRIVER THAT HE WAS "AMERICAN GENERAL". WHO
HAD COME TO RESUPPLY RIGHTIST PHALANGIST MILITAMEN
INVOLVED IN FIGHTING PALESTINIAN COMMANDOS AND LEFTIST
MOSLEM GROUPS." PAPER FURTHER STATES THAT "SPOKESMAN
FOR PDFLP SAID THAT SUCH AN ACTION AS KIDNAPPING WAS NOT
THEIR POLICY. IT MAY BE POLICY OF OTHER GROUPS, BUT IT
IS NOT OUR,HE SAID ... DIFFERENT VIEW CAME FROM
PFLP SPOKESMAN THERE DENIED HAVING COLONEL IN THEIR CUSTODY
BUT COMMENTED THAT IF WE HAD HIM, WE WOULD USE HIM TO
BARGAIN FOR AN EXCHANGE OF PRISONERS, BECAUSE ONLY THEN
WOULD ISREAL BE FORCED TO SHOW THAT ITS INTEREST DO NOT
COINCIDE WITH AMERICA'S REUTER CORRESPONDENT HAS TOLD
EMBASSY THAT PFLP SPOKESMAN MADE SAME REMARK TO HIM.

8. SECERAL JULY 4 PAPERS, INCLUDING LEADING PRO-PLO
"AL-MUHARRIR", CARRY WHAT APPEARS TO BE AN OFFICIALLY-
INSPIRED VIEW THAT "IT IS NOT CLEAR YET WHETHER COLONEL
HAS INDEED BEEN KIDNAPPED OR WHETHER HE HAS DISAPPEARED
IN CIRCUMSTANCES AND FOR REASONS THAT ARE STILL UNKNOWN,
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SINCE CONTACTS THAT SECURITY AUTHORITIES HAVE UNDERTAKEN
WITH CERTAIN QUARTERS HAVE CONFIRMED THAT HE IS NOT BE
FOUND AMONG THEM".

9. TWO LEFTIST PAPERS, PRO-IRAQI " BEIRUT" AND PRO-SOVIET
LEBANESE COMMUNIST PARTY "AN-NIDA" PUBLISH
WHAT MAY BE OPENING BLAST IN CAMPAIGN TO PAINT MORGAN
AS AGENT OF CIA DISPATCHED TO LEBANON AS PART OF ALLEGED
INTERFERENCE IN LEBANES INTENAL AFFAIRS;
"UP TO LAST NIGHT, INVESTIGATING AUTHORITIES IN BEIRUT HAD
NOT LEARNED FATE OF COLONEL MORGAN, WHO WAS KIDNAPPED
FROM BLACK FIAT (SIC) DURING RECENT BLOODY EVENTS. THERE
IS INFORMATION THAT COLONEL MORGAN CAME TO LEBANON FEW
DAYS BEFORE BLOODY EVENTS (SIC). REGISTERED HIMSELF AT
MELKART HOTEL WITHOUT MENTIONING HIS OFFICIAL CAPACITY,
WORE CIVILIAN CLOTHES, MADE SEVERAL TRIPS TO VARIOUS
PLACES IN CAPITAL, AND MAY HAVE MET WITH SOME EXTREME
RIGHTIST ELEMENTS (SIC). ALTHOUGH AMERICAN EMBASSY IN
BEIRUT HAS ALLEGED THAT COLONEL WAS KIDNAPPED NEAR AIRPORT
CIRCLE NEXT TO SHATILA CAMP, INFORMED SOURCES HAVE SAID

THAT PERSON WHOM FEDAYEEN ARRESTED AT AIRPORT CIRCLE CARRIED
NO IDENTIFICATION PAPERS AND WAS SOMEONE ELSE. TAXI DRIVER
WHO WAS TAKING MORGAN FROM AIRPORT TO AMERICAN EMBASSY KSIC)
SAID THAT COLONEL WAS CARRYING HIS PASSPORT WHEN ARMED MEN
STOPPED HIS VEHICLE. SOURCES CLOSE TO INVESTIGATING
AUTHORITIES SAY AFFAIR OF COLONEL MORGAN REVEALS ROLE OF CIA
IN BEIRUT AND ITS PARTICIPATION AND INVOLVEMENT IN
BLOODY AVENTS THAT LEBANON HAS WITNESSED. THESE SOURCES
ADD THAT PRESENSE AND SUSPICIONS MOVEMENTS OF AMERICAN
OFFICER IN BEIRUT CONFIRM INVOLVEMENT OF CIA
IN ESCALATION OF EVENTS."

10. MANY JULY 4 PAPERS, INCLUDING LEADING PRO-PLO
"AL MUHARRIR" ALSO CARRY STATEMENT OF PFLP SPOKESMEN
BASSAM ABU SHARIF WHICH EMBASSY HOPES IS NOT STAGESETTER
FOR FURTHER DEVELOPMENTS: "ABU SHARIF ANNOUNCED THAT CIA
WAS BEHIND PLOT TO WEAKEN PALESTINIAN RESISTANCE
MOVEMENT IN LEBANON. SOME AGENTS OF CIA WHO HAVE ARRIVED
RECENTLY HAVE SUPERVISED INPLEMENTAION OF CHAPTERS OF
PLOT IN COOPERATION AND COORDINATION WITH LOCAL
REACTIONARIES. ABU SHARIF ALSO CONFIRMED PALESTINIAN
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REVOLUTIONS'S DETERMINATION TO STAND IN FACE OF SCHEMES
OF AMERICA AND ARAB REACTIONARIES FOR SURRENDERISY
SETTLEMENT
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